

Please e-mail your completed research summary to homecare.losh@iir.ucla.edu by **February 7, 2007** so it can be included in a binder for distribution at the February 16 meeting.

RESEARCH SUMMARY SHEET

Title: CARING FOR AMERICA [book under contract with Oxford University Press] We Are Looking for an Appropriate Sub title and need help!!!!

Research Partners: Eileen Boris, Women's Studies Program, University of California, Santa Barbara and Jennifer Klein, History, Yale University

Objective(s): This is a book about the labor of long-term care and the intertwined struggle of workers and clients for dignity, self-determination, security, and personal and social worth. Not only do we give home care a history, but in the process we challenge predominant models and assumptions about the American welfare state that divide public from private sectors, deserving from undeserving recipients of social assistance, so to consider how state organization of home care opened avenues for organizing home care.

Research Methods: Historical; Theoretical

Key Findings:

Since the 1930s, government social policies directly shaped the development of home care, opening the way for struggles over working conditions. The resulting unionization drives in the late 20th century revitalized service sector organizing and transformed the face of American labor. As public service work performed in private homes, home care not only challenges existing paradigms in labor and social welfare history, it questions standard divisions of the American welfare state and illuminates the relationship between public assistance and 'work,' which has a much longer history than generally recognized. The promotion of self-sufficiency, self-care and self-support, for the disabled and impaired elderly, increasingly cast as "rehabilitation" and ending "dependency," became linked with the movement of poor single mothers from public assistance into the low-waged labor force, also characterized as the ending of dependency. From the 1930s through the 1980s, we show that each generation of government officials and welfare professionals clung to the premise that African American and other poor women would be rehabilitated through new jobs in domestic labor.

Between 1950 and 1980, the expansion of Social Security to cover the disabled and legislation to address the vicissitudes of old age, including the Older Americans Act and Medicare/Medicaid, established the basis for extended social services within the welfare state. Public welfare initiatives—new policies to fight poverty and expand public assistance, including various jobs programs of the War on Poverty and workfare for recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—were to provide the workforce. At the same time, public and voluntary hospitals began their own physician-supervised home care programs in order to move chronically ill patients (many of them too impoverished to pay) out of the hospital. We thus examine the emergence of a postwar competing medical model for home care which contested

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the professional authority of social welfare caseworkers. Whether provided through the medical model of hospital-based programs or the social assistance model of private or public agencies, the clash of professional expertise left the home attendant in occupational limbo, expected to perform the auxiliary labor of social or physical rehabilitation, yet cast as neither nurse nor maid.

Law and social policy additionally froze these workers in an employment limbo. While the expanding welfare state helped create this particular low-wage labor market, national budget politics and retrenchment further casualized the labor. When the federal government reigned in social welfare spending in the 1970s and 1980s, states and localities desperately coped through cost-shifting, privatization of services, and “flexible” labor policies. By reconstructing the politics of federalism in the Nixon and Reagan eras, a history of home health care illustrates how devolution and privatization have played out in the contemporary American welfare state, exacerbating social inequality by race and gender.

But ours is also a story of worker, consumer, and recipient activism, how a coalition of seniors, the disabled, and unions linked better working conditions to better care that by century’s end made this “invisible workforce” visible. Home care unionism belonged to an effervescence of organizing among poor, black, and Latina women. It originated in social justice movements for domestic workers’ recognition, rights, and dignity; farm worker unionism; public sector militancy bound up with political mobilization around state budgets; and the community organizing of groups like ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). It was part of the welfare rights movement. The victories of the 1990s did not just happen; they were the culmination of a 35 year struggle that began with the surge in public sector unionism in the mid-1960s, but often involved community based organizing. These movements not only reached out to workers in casual or service sectors; they sought to invent new structures of representation and, even, distinct notions of unionism. Before caregivers were even able to bargain for better conditions, they had to see themselves as workers and fight for such recognition by the public, the state, and the very users of their services. They had to gain visibility and dignity, two key phrases in both self and media representation of homecare providers. They had to seek the right to organize in the first place. But there was a silver lining in the welfare state location. Just as state provision had created this low wage labor force, it also offered a political opening to transform the conditions and status of such labor. Returning to the notion that home care workers labor for the welfare state in the public realm, SEIU particularly promoted a new round of policy innovations, like the Public Authority, and moved to community-based organizing, both suited to promote unionization of a growing “flexible” service workforce.

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Resources Available (reports, surveys, articles, tables, maps, videos, popular education materials, etc.):

Article included in packet; article forthcoming in Cobble, ed., *The Sex of Class* (Cornell, 2007).

Book is still in progress!

Dates of Research: 2003--

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